1: Burrows--142-143 (1947-48) Woleaians 1-3
116, 646, 537 Ifalik

"Other evidence on rules of conduct is verbal. Yet much of it is in a native setting, hence probably more representative of native behavior than replies to questions from a foreigner would be. It consists of the harangues delivered by the chiefs to the people at three public meetings held in the men's house. At these meetings the chiefs not only make announcements and issue specific orders, but lecture the people about their conduct in general. These speeches or sermons are a traditional way of 'laying down the law'.

There were three of these meetings during our stay. One object of the first, held on August 14, was to issue as formal chiefly commands the suggestions of the American physician about hygiene, made during the visit of the ship that had brought us to Ifalik two weeks earlier. But the immediate occasion of the meeting was a chance remark of Spiro's that there were Americans on other islands, doing the same kind of work that we were doing on Ifalik.

Unexpectedly, this stirred up considerable excitement. The whole expedition, or set of expeditions, seemed to be taken as a kind of competitive examination, in which the visiting Americans would give the various islands a comparative rating in conduct, particularly in cleanliness. In other words, it touched off the lively sentiment of rank--in this case, comparative rank among islands. The people of Ifalik were eager to get a high rating--to gain in rank, if possible, at the expense of their neighbors, in the eyes of the Americans, whom they acknowledged as their superiors; or at least, not to

sink lower. The occasion of the 2nd meeting, held on September 4, was similar; to carry out the suggestions of the American governor and physician, made when the ship called on September 2. The occasion of the third meeting was, at least in part, my request to the chiefs for a performance of the men's religious dances (ur), which otherwise would not have been seen during our stay.

There was a certain amount of formality about the proceedings [KS: public meeting]. Although informal announcements of them spread by word of mouth a day or two before, the formal call was issued (for two of the three we saw) by the lowest-ranking chief, Toromann. He took a conch-shell trumpet, went out on one of the stone piers [143] projecting into the lagoon from Katēlū, and blew repeated long blasts. The meetings were held at the highest-ranking site on the atoll, Katēlū. The people assembled in and about the men's house or big house (Fan Nap), highest ranking building on the site. When they were gathered, the chiefs took their seats beside the highest-ranking part of the building, the ÓngarIk or front ridge-post, decorated with symbols of rank. After a dignified silence, the chiefs spoke. First to speak was always Toromann, the lowest in rank, as if 'introducing the main speaker'. In part the contents of his speech were the same as those of the others, but always he enjoined the people to heed well the words of their chiefs. The second speaker, at least in the first and last of the three meetings (this point not noted for the second one), was Wolpetau, paramount chief. Other chiefs spoke, as the spirit moved them, in no fixed order. This was partly a matter of individual gifts

and inclinations. Old Paliuilimar, who had a reputation as an orator, always spoke, and was the most vehement and dramatic; indeed, at the close of some of his speeches he looked alarmingly exhausted. Wolpetau always spoke, ex officio; but seemed not to revel in it as Toromann and Paliuilimar did. Ordinarily he was a man of rather few words. Maroligar spoke only once, and then briefly, in a low voice. WolpaitIk never spoke at all. Not only was he the youngest in years and length of service, but he was fat, had a very high voice, and was a bit of a clown and butt of ridicule, though the jokes were always good-natured. Commoners never spoke, except for brief interjections of assent and applause, like 'amen-shouting'. In this the most frequent expression was Rongrongo! (Hear, hear!)"

1: Burrows--143
116, 646, 522, 514

(1947-48)

Woleaians
Ifalik

"At the end, the chiefs distributed tobacco among the people. Jokes, which might come at any moment in their speeches, were frequent in their last words; as if to heal any wounds inflicted by what scolding was involved in the earlier ones. This interpretation accords with repeated statements, some of them in song texts, that an extremely high value is set on kindly words from the chiefs. With 'good talk' from their chiefs, the people will thrive and live to a ripe old age; with 'bad talk', they will die.

I managed to get a translation of only one of these jokes, made by Wolpetau as he walked among the women, passing out tobacco with a bit of jolly swagger, which, I judge, may have come hard to this quiet, dignified man. He and the others had been preaching about hygiene, especially about using the lagoon or the American-plan 'over-water heads' for defecation. Wolpetau said: 'If any woman wants to defecate on shore, let her make a basket, and defecate in that, and then carry it into the sea.' This was greeted with uproarious laughter."

"For a more specific picture of one of these meetings, here is the account of the last one, from my field journal:

Oct. 23.-Third public meeting today. The people had notice of it yesterday. In the morning Toromann blew the conch from the stone pier. He made two trips, seemed like an hour apart. The people were slow to come.

Toromann began with what sounded, in Tom's translation, like the usual formal beginning. Come all ye. Listen to what the chiefs have to say. 'Work good, no work bad. No steal something from 'nother man.' He spoke in five bursts, with meditative pauses between. Burst 3 was apparently a joke, but I didn't get it translated in time.

As usual, WolpaitIk didn't talk. Maroligar, toward the end, did, but in a low conversational tone and at no considerable length. In a pause between Toromann's early efforts, Maroligar suggested something to Paliuilimar, seemed like [144] urging him to speak; but P. said nothing at that time. Toromann's last burst was to the effect that when women were working in the taro swamp, they should not take taro that did not belong to them.

Wolpetau was the second speaker. He talked about menstruating women. Said when the blood first appeared, they should go into their seclusion house and stay there, not go to the taro swamp. When the flow was finished, and not before then, was the time to go back to work.

Between bursts, he worked industriously at rope-making.

Wolpetau's second burst was to the effect that when the chiefs tell men to go out fishing, they are to go. Then, if there is a good catch, the chiefs will see to it that fish are distributed to all the people.

Third burst: if any man doesn't want to go out with the others when the chiefs order a fishing expedition, let him speak up now.*

Then Toromann filled in, beginning with a hear, hear the words of the chief. He pointed out that if men didn't go fishing, and women didn't work in the taro swamp, there would be nothing to eat. Ifalik is too small. (Meaning, apparently, too small to support loafers.) He called on Paliuilimar to speak, but the old man did not respond until the second urging. Then he finally got going, in a low voice at first, but warming up. He told the people to heed what their chiefs said--the regular formula. Said some men didn't seem to like to work when the chiefs told them to. Very bad business that. He also told them to do whatever Mel Spiro and I told them to (but of course we're not giving orders, except to Talimeira and Uveli**of a morning.) He told them to clean up,

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"* Apparently a challenge to some malingerer. Mainly rhetorical; as might be expected, nobody spoke up.

** Talimeira was assigned by the chiefs to work for us; Uveli volunteered for the same service.

against the coming of the ship.

Finally, when everything seemed about over, Wolpetau said that by and by there would be dancing. This was the promised response to my suggestion that I'd like to see some of the ur I have been getting the words to. I could not make out whether he set a definite time, but they'll come through.

Paliuilimar and Toromann wound up with short speeches. I had asked Tom to tell the chiefs that the important place to clean was around the houses, and to avoid stagnant water because of mosquitoes, rather than to do a wholesale weeding job in the interior, as they did after the last call of the ship. Pointed out that the doctor was the man interested in how clean they were. Paliuilimar said something to that effect in his final speech, but by the time it got back to me in Tom's translation it was somewhat diluted.

The element of formality makes of these meetings a ritual, not unlike the type of church service in our culture that emphasizes the sermon. In this case the meaning is not religious. Like the kava ceremonies of western Polynesia, parts of Fiji, and some eastern Micronesian islands, these meetings serve to manifest and emphasize the sentiments of rank and law and order, as exemplified by obedience to the chiefs."

1: Burrows--144-146 (1947-48) Woleaians
116, 626, 646 Ifalik 1-3

"To show which rules of conduct are particularly emphasized, recurrent [145] commandments in the speeches at the three meetings are listed below, beginning with those that seemed most frequent. The list is minimal, because Tom was not so well trained for running translations as the interpreters who perform the same service at meetings of the United Nations; so his accounts were sketchy. It was only at the last meeting that I could understand any considerable part of what was going on; and even that was only midway in our stay on the island, so the language was still only dawning on me. The commandments recorded were these:

Heed the words of the chiefs
Clean away rubbish
Work hard, so that there will be plenty of food
Do not steal (with emphasis on food)
Share with the poor and sick (emphasis on food)
Build 'overwater heads' or latrines

Another commandment, not recorded at these meetings, but heard several times--one of them, in a hypothetical chief's address to the people dictated by Tom as a text--was 'Do not speak evil of people of another clan.' During one of the meetings, Paliuilimar spoke especially to people of his clan, Mangaulevăr, and Maroligar followed with a brief talk which contained repeated mention of his clan, SauvelărIk. I did not manage to get a translation of this passage.

The repeated insistence on respect and obedience to the chiefs illustrates one of the main purposes of these meetings. The repeated emphasis on food suggests that one of the main sentiments clusters about food; at least, that abundance of food is a master value. The repeated strictures against idling and stealing suggest that these may be particularly common forms of misbehavior, though the only specific instance noted was the tongue-lashing about shirking communal fishing, which seemed to be directed at one or more specific malingerers.

Conspicuous by their absence from these harangues are rules about sexual relations and violence. To be sure, the one mention of the traditional behavior required of menstruating women is in the general area of sexuality. But nothing was said about clan exogamy or adultery. Clan exogamy is certainly taken seriously. We have seen that there were no violations of it in 1947-8. Perhaps it is so generally observed there is no need to talk about it.

Adultery is quite another matter. According to common report it was, at least, not uncommon. The fact that the chiefs did not condemn it in their speeches may indicate that this is a rule which the government does not try to enforce.

As to violence, that seems to be, like violation of clan exogamy, so rare that it does not have to be condemned verbally. Certainly the courteous, peaceable behavior of these people is one of their most striking characteristics.

The frequent exhortations against theft in the chiefs speeches at public meetings

suggest that this crime may not be uncommon. There is no question that public opinion strongly condemns it. Tom repeatedly expressed abhorrence of a thief (melmorók). But he as often assured us that the people of Ifalik would not steal anything of ours; that we need have no hesitation about leaving our property unguarded. Judging by the chiefs' exhortations, the kind of property most often stolen is food. At least once, taro was specifically mentioned. In the taro patches the vegetation is so dense, and the place so little frequented, that a worker could often take taro from someone else's patch without being seen. All we can say, in the absence of specific cases, is that theft, whether rare or not, is at least rarely detected."